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ABSTRACT

Text linguistics, a recent development in the study of language, moves the focus of inquiry from the sentence to the text and examines texts as acts of communication rather than individual, static sentences. It investigates textuality rather than grammaticality, the relationships between sentences and between text and context that make text coherent rather than the relationships within a sentence that make it grammatical. A distinctive feature of text linguistics is its procedural approach to language study, treating texts as outcomes of an array of interactive operations between producer, receiver, text, and context. Another important feature is the integrative treatment of the standards of textuality. Texts are studied as part of a dynamic process of interaction between text and context. On this point, text linguistics and contemporary composition theory are moving closer to each other. Text linguists have used findings of composition research to enrich their understanding of the text, and composition teachers would benefit from the work of text linguists in the teaching of writing. A 14-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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THE MAJOR CONCERNS OF TEXTLINGUISTICS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE TEACHING OF WRITING

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Text linguistics, a recent development in the study of language, moves the focus of study from the sentence to the text, assuming a procedural approach to the object of study. It examines texts as acts of communication rather than individual, static sentences. It investigates textuality rather than grammaticality, the relationships obtaining between sentences and between text and context that make the text coherent rather than the relationships within a sentence that make the sentence grammatical. Although a single sentence might conceivably constitute a text, text linguistics approaches a single-sentence text, not as a self-contained unit with its internal structure and elements for scrutiny and analysis, but as an outcome of an interactive process with its external context, physical and linguistic: the physical circumstances under which it occurs and the relationships it has with other texts (Beaugrande, "Text Linguistics"; van Dijk, Text; van Dijk, Macrostructure).

In other words, text linguistics studies the properties of whole texts and their uses in communicative interaction, "to find out what standards texts must fulfill, how they might be produced or received, what people are using them for in a given setting of

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occurrence . . . how the texts function in human interaction" (Beaugrande and Dressler 3). Quite clearly, text linguistics concerns itself with issues that engage most composition instructors' interest, and more importantly, its procedural and interactive approach to the study of text would be thought-provoking for composition teachers. This paper discusses the procedural and interactive approach to the major concerns of text linguistics and their relevance to the teaching of writing.

The Procedural Approach

A distinctive feature of text linguistics is its procedural approach to the study of language, a feature that sets it apart from structural linguistics and even transformational grammar, not only in that it deals with texts rather than individual sentences, but also in that it treats texts as outcomes of a whole array of interactive operations between the text producer, the text receiver, the text, and the context. It incorporates pragmatics and semantics in its domain of inquiry to explore the use of language in producing texts: the goals of the writer, the attitude of the reader, and the situation where the text operates (Beaugrande, Text Production; Beaugrande, Text, Discourse, Process; Beaugrande and Dressler).

Using the procedural approach, text linguists examine the phases of interactive operations leading to the production of texts and view the text as a system resulting from selection and decision-making in a sustaining process. Textual properties,

such as cohesion and coherence, are interpreted in the complexity of language use in the social context of communication. The dynamic nature of the procedural approach parallels that of the process approach to writing. A few points have emerged in the way text linguists explain the procedural phases in text production that are directly useful to a better understanding of students' difficulties in their composing processes.

According to Beaugrande, text linguistics identifies goal setting, ideation, conceptual development, and phrase linearization (transforming a simultaneous array of ideas and imagery into a linear linguistic sequence) as operational phases in the procedure which are parallel rather than serial, that is, any two or more of them may occur at the same time rather than follow each other in any rigid order. Among the phases occurring simultaneously, one phase is usually dominant, but dominance may shift from one phase to another very quickly depending on the need the writer perceives in view of the unfolding text. This unrestrained shifting of dominance confirms the recursiveness of composing processes composition researchers have emphasized (Emig; Perl; Sommers).

Furthermore, the notion of one operation, e.g., conceptual development, dominating at a particular moment while another operation, e.g., goal-setting or ideation, could take over the dominance the next moment belies the rigid rules students have imbibed from traditional composition instruction. Many students

have been led to believe that the only correct route for writing a composition is phrasing a topic, making a thesis statement, writing an outline, and then fleshing out the outline. Piously believing writing is an orderly business, they are scared of any deviation from the "correct route." In this connection, the notion of variable dominance by different operations could be used to allay students' fear of chaos in the process of writing and as a result reduce their writing apprehension. An instructor could help her students by demonstrating how she moves easily between a moment when phrase linearization dominates and a moment when conceptual development dominates and further how the operation of goal setting could be concurrent with any other operations. Consequently, students could be encouraged to take a more flexible attitude toward their composing processes.

In connection with the notion of one operation dominating at a particular moment, text linguists study the allocation of resources at various points during the composing processes. Resources, including memory, attention, and motor control, are used differently by experienced and novice writers. It may happen that a novice writer keeps an operation inappropriately in dominance for an extended period of time, allocating to it more resources at that particular moment than is beneficial to the advance of the writing process. For example, before he has allowed ideation and conceptual development to progress far enough, he may place phrase linearization in dominance, giving it excessive amounts of attention and motor control. That could

result in a bottleneck, even a block, in the process because, without resources being re-allocated to ideation or conceptual development, phrase linearization would become an inane endeavor in mechanical inscription, which would not lead to substantive, meaningful writing.

On the other hand, an experienced writer, when finding herself in such a dilemma, would not hesitate to back off a step or two from the current dominant operation and devote her resources to evaluating the overall situation, in order to decide which operation would be the most efficient if moved into dominance at this moment. Then, she would readjust her outlay of resources accordingly. If she found the readjustment unsatisfactory, she would re-evaluate the situation, possibly going all the way back to square one to determine whether planning and goal-setting should move to the dominant position in the foreground, receiving more of her resources. Therefore, she is much less likely to be hampered by a writer's block than a novice writer. It should not be surprising that composition instructors could obtain some insights into the writer's block and make some headway toward helping students overcome it, by virtue of the text linguistic view of allocating and re-allocating resources according to which operation best qualifies for the dominant position at a certain moment in the composing process.

Another noteworthy concept in the procedural approach to the study of text is thresholds of initiation and termination

(Beaugrande and Dressler). The threshold of initiation indicates the standards the writer sets for starting the process of composing and the threshold of termination refers to the level of satisfaction a writer feels before he or she deems the worked to be completed. Both these standards have important implications for the teaching of writing. Student writers may have a tendency to set too high a threshold of initiation and too low a threshold of termination. Many student writers harbor a misconception about writing, believing that good writers have everything ready in their mind, and ideas, well developed and organized, simply flow from their pens into neat lines on paper. Therefore, they tend to use that belief as their threshold of initiation. When they find that their writing could not start off as easily and methodically, they are frustrated, blaming the failure on their own inaptitude. If they could, however, be encouraged to adjust the threshold of initiation to accept false starts, messy try-outs, and expendable first pages, they would more readily start the composing process, exploring, discovering, and shaping their ideas while moving ahead with the creation of text.

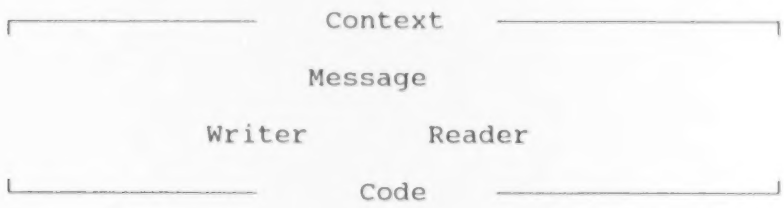
While they tend to set an unrealistically high threshold of initiation, student writers, somewhat ironically, often set a very low threshold of termination. They are more likely to exit the composing process when they feel they have transcribed everything in their mind concerning the topic on to paper. As Donald Murray recently pointed out, "The best students fall in

love with their first drafts, and when they make them superficially correct they think they are finished; the poorest students also look to the mysteries of presentation . . . and see nothing beyond" (viii). They may be satisfied with what they have produced because they do not have experience in critical reading to raise their expectations over and beyond what is already on paper. Equally possible, they are not really satisfied with the product; rather, they do not know what to do other than correct spelling and grammar errors. In both cases, the students fail to see writing as an open-ended task that needs working and reworking to reach a high standard of completion. They should be encouraged to set a higher threshold of termination when they have the first draft down on paper, that is, they should be encouraged to view the draft as a basis for extensive revision involving a combination of the operations they have gone through in drafting--planning, ideation, conceptual development, phrase linearization, etc. Of course, the establishment of the threshold termination has to be realistic, taking into account the student's current level of proficiency. If it is too much beyond his or her reach, the student may be discouraged. Learning to write, which is an on-going process, takes more than one or two pieces of writing to bear noticeable fruits.

The Standards of Textuality

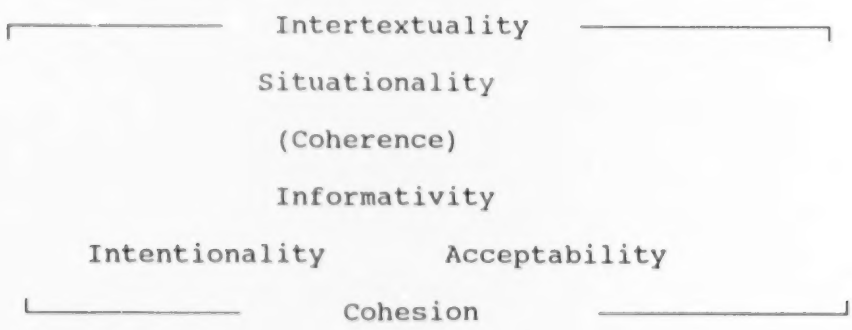
In text linguistics, the procedural approach is applied to the study of textuality, which has seven standards: cohesion, coherence, intentioanality, acceptability, situationality, intertextuality, and informativity (Beaugrande and Dressler). If these standards are laid out along with the rhetorical triangle, it becomes apparent that they fall into a pattern very similar to the triangle.

The rhetorical triangle:



(Hartwell and Bentley 38).

The standards of textuality:



The close parallels between the standards of textuality and the elements of the rhetorical triangle encourage the application of findings in the study of textuality to the study and teaching of writing. In the study of textuality, the seven standards are not addressed separately, each in isolation. Rather, each of them is placed at the interface of all the factors and examined in the dynamics of interaction. For example, cohesion is not only a group of surface textual features that tie sentences together, but also the result of interactions between several standards. Intentionality may have an impact on the realization of cohesion, and so does situationality. Walker Gibson shows how the author's intention could affect the use of cohesive devices in his analysis of the introductory paragraph of A Farewell to Arms. Hemingway wrote: "There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see flashes from the artillery." He did not choose to give a direct logical relation between the two clauses by writing "We knew there was fighting in the mountains, for at night we could see flashes from the artillery." According to Gibson, Hemingway wanted to show "[t]he awareness of the fighting and the seeing of the flashes are all part of a huge complex of personal feeling, and the connection between the various sensations are left (deliberately of course) ambiguous" (37). That is, cohesion is conditioned in the operations to actualize the author's intention.

So also is coherence, which involves not only the intentionality but also the acceptability--the roles both writer

and reader play in the context of composing and comprehending. Coherence is a pattern of meaning (Hartwell and Bentley), analogous to semantics in the underlying structures of texts, "a theoretical construct in text structure [referring] to the underlying relations that hold between assertions (or propositions) and how they contribute to the overall discourse theme" (Grabe 110). But this pattern of meaning becomes actually meaningful only when it is the result of a "successful interaction between the reader and the discourse to be processed" (Johns 250). Moreover, it operates under the constraints of truth value and real-world reference, involving another standard of textuality--situationality. Therefore, coherence is contingent upon factors that reside not only in the text but also beyond the text.

After the above very cursory look at the text linguistic treatment of cohesion and coherence as text features interacting with other standards of textuality, we could at least point to the importance of stopping teaching cohesive ties and coherence devices as purely textual matters. Students should be encouraged to achieve cohesion and coherence in the process of realizing the purpose of writing, accommodating the needs of audience, and making the writing appropriate to the situation. Conversely, the concepts of purpose, audience, and situation could be made more tangible in a writing class when they are related to textual features conducive to cohesion and coherence. A writer cannot satisfy the requirements of textuality by only meeting one or two

of its standards. The standards, parts of a whole complex, obtain their significance in interactions with each other and dissolve as viable entities when isolated. We should treat them as such.

The relevance of text linguistics to the teaching of writing derives from its procedural approach to the study of text and its integrative treatment of the standards of textuality. Texts are studied as part of a dynamic process characterized by interactions between text and context. On this crucial point, text linguistics and contemporary composition theory are moving closer to each other. Since text linguists have not been hesitant to use findings in composition research to enrich their understanding of the text--its production and reception (Beaugrande, Text Production; Beaugrande and Dressler), composition teachers have good reasons to pay due attention to the work of text linguists and make use of their findings in writing classes.

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